Evangelism and Power:
Religion, Geopolitics, and Conscience in Latin America

This text addresses three interconnected themes: the rise of Pentecostal evangelicalism in Latin America and its integration into geopolitics and power dynamics; a reflection on the limits of civil government from the perspective of natural law and divine obligation; and the historical stance of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the relationship between Church and State. Together, they explore how religion, politics, and individual conscience have shaped conflicts and alliances in the region.

1. Evangelism and State Power in Latin America

Liberation Theology, promoted by some sectors of the Catholic Church, advocated for a preferential option for the poor, an approach that not only criticized poverty and inequality but also questioned dominant economic models.

In response to this ideological threat, the United States government sought to foster the growth of Protestant evangelical movements as a way to weaken the popular roots of Catholicism in Latin America. This strategy was most intensely applied across Central America and the Andean region. (Guatemala, Nicaragua: El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador). The collaboration between U.S. agencies and evangelical groups was not accidental but part of a broader geopolitical agenda.

In 1960, the Latin American Catholic Church began to transform, which is when Liberation Theology emerged—an interpretation of the Gospels based on the preferential option for the poor. Priests and nuns began to become involved in social causes, peasant struggles, and other such issues. Christianity ceased to view poverty as a moral failing and began to question its political and economic causes.

Of course, every accumulation of progressive forces generates its counterpart, and this counterpart had one of its main epicenters in the United States. Economically ultraliberal and politically ultraconservative sectors began to organize a major ideological and geopolitical counteroffensive against anything that smacked of redistribution, national sovereignty, or social transformation.

Some aspects of this reaction are quite well known. In the economic sphere, neoliberalism emerged to replace Keynesianism, which was an economic theory developed by British economist John Maynard Keynes. In the military sphere, the doctrine of national security transformed Latin American armed forces into veritable armies of occupation against their own people. But there was a third, less discussed, yet decisive element: the advance of Pentecostal Evangelism as a political and cultural tool in Latin America. Why? With what objective?

In 1969, Nelson Rockefeller toured Latin America and later wrote a report for Richard Nixon. The context was precisely what we described: Liberation Theology, strong labor unions, nationalist military forces, and a Catholic Church that was increasingly inconvenient for Washington.

In that report, Rockefeller warned that the Latin American Catholic Church had become vulnerable to subversive infiltration and was even willing to support revolutions to end social injustice. In other words, it had ceased to be a reliable ally for the United States.

Shortly afterward, military dictatorships swept across the continent, and among their victims were many priests, nuns, and Christian military personnel committed to the poor and to social justice. There are the Salvadoran martyrs, the Argentine Third World priests, and the religious figures persecuted in Brazil, Guatemala, and Chile. The repression was not only against the political left; it was also against a segment of Latin American Christianity.

But the story doesn't end there. During those years, the so-called Santa Fe documents also appeared—texts written by conservative American intellectuals to guide Washington's foreign policy toward Latin America. Brazilian theologian Frey Beto argues that although these documents did not explicitly mention evangelism, they clearly revealed a logic: to promote anti-communist, individualistic, depoliticized forms of religiosity aligned with the values of North American capitalism. Pentecostal evangelical churches fit this profile perfectly.

With financial, media, and political support from the United States, as well as from large private companies, evangelism began to expand rapidly throughout Latin America. In the 1960s, evangelical churches had around 4 million members in the region. By the mid-1970s, that number had reached 8 million. In 1987, it had climbed to 40 million, and today, according to figures from the churches themselves, it exceeds 160 million people.

At this point, we're no longer just talking about religion; we're talking about political power, the media, campaign financing, parliamentary lobbying, and shaping public opinion, because conservative

evangelicalism long ago ceased to be confined to the Temple or the Church. **Today, it occupies ministries, congresses, television channels, and presidential campaigns. It even pontificates from the Oval Office itself, placing figures like Trump and Jesus Christ more or less on the same level (as Saviors).** As a result, in Latin America, evangelical churches and the growth of their political power in the region have transformed faith into a field of geopolitical dispute.

The biblical response to the Catholic Church's Liberation Theology in Latin America is that, for Christ Yahshua, the true mission of the Church is the salvation of the soul in Christ and spiritual transformation—achieved when the believer, through faith in Christ, appropriates the righteousness of God—thereby gaining victory over past sins, sins committed deliberately, and sins known to the conscience. **It is understood that biblical "liberation" refers to sin and not to sociopolitical emancipation, or nationalistic social agendas.**

Liberation theology combines Marxist philosophy with certain biblical themes. It maintains that all Christian theology must be reconstructed by viewing it through the lens of the "oppressor-oppressed" dynamic. As previously mentioned, liberation theology emerged in the 1960s to advocate for the liberation of various groups—primarily the poor, Black people, and women—from economic and political subjugation in Latin America. According to this theology, it is not enough merely to support the oppressed; one must commit to social movements—and even revolutions—dedicated to dismantling societal structures such as unregulated capitalism, class struggle and division, and structural dependencies like imperialism and the economic subordination of impoverished nations to dominant powers. Although liberation theology was effectively silenced during the papacy of John Paul II—which harshly criticized its use of Marxist analytical categories like class struggle and warned that it reduced the Gospel to purely political and material liberation—it was subsequently refined and endorsed by Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope. **The fact remains that this theology adopted Marxism as an "analytical tool," using it to radically revise traditional biblical Christian doctrine during its formative stages.**

The expansion of Pentecostal evangelicalism in Latin America, driven by geopolitical and financial support, was a strategic response to Liberation Theology, whose "preferential option for the poor" challenged the economic and political status quo. **This process transformed religion into a field of power**, leaving behind a religious and cultural polarization that persists to this day—yet one that the Christ of the Scriptures does not endorse.

2. THE LIMITS OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

From the Perspective of Natural Law and Divine Obligation

In these times it seems urgent that the public gain a clearer understanding of the limits of popular government power. There are signs that very little clarity exists on this matter and, therefore, it cannot be left unaddressed.

The principle that *"the majority must govern*" is valid, but it is not universally applicable. There is a serious danger of its overreach: it should be evident that the majority cannot make rules about everything for the minority, however small that minority may be. If that were the case, *individual rights* would not exist, because anything subject to the will of the majority ceases to be a right. *A right* is something inherent in the person who possesses it by its very nature and wholly independent of the will of others; otherwise it would be no more than a privilege granted by a superior to an inferior, fulfilling the maxim: "might makes right."

Yet one of the fundamental principles of our (US) government is that "all men are created equal." No one has the prerogative to be owner or master over another individual and to prescribe the rules by which that person must live. All are equal in the right to think and act according to their inclinations. **However, this right is limited by that very equality: no individual may do anything that interferes with the rights of his neighbor; what invades another's rights ceases to be a right. Rights cannot conflict: they run on parallel lines, never crossing or colliding**.

Every individual has rights. The Declaration of Independence of the United States proclaims that "all men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," among which are "*Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness*". These great truths are embedded in the foundational principles of American law.

"*Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness*" are general terms, **but it is not for governments to arbitrarily define their limits.** In fact there is a naturally fixed limit: the line that borders the rights of others. **One person's rights must not interfere with another's**. Generally speaking, every man has the right to do whatever he pleases, **so long as in doing so he does not infringe upon the inherent rights of others.**

These rights are a necessary consequence of the fact that all men are created equal. That fact grants each individual equal authority and does not permit anyone to have a natural dominion over others. **No man derives his rights and liberties from his fellow men, but from his Creator**—as the Declaration of Independence of the United States states**—and consequently only the Creator can legitimately remove them**. Otherwise, the individual could be stripped of them for any alleged misbehavior.

The purpose of government, as the Declaration of Independence asserts, **is to protect these rights**: **the rights of the individual**. Governments are not instituted merely to govern themselves, enrich themselves, or become great and powerful **at the expense of the individuals who compose them, nor to perpetuate themselves irrespective of the desires of the governed, but to protect each individual in the enjoyment of his rights**. Because the individual cannot protect himself against others, he delegates, in this respect, **his right to certain chosen persons to make laws, thereby preserving peace and order, backed by the power of the people who elect them. This is what constitutes republican government: the delegation of the power and authority of the citizens, the individuals, to their representatives. This is done, directly or indirectly, through elections in which each individual has an equal voice**. The people rule, **and those elected to that office are public servants who carry out their wil**l; **they are not, in any sense, dominant rulers over the people.**

Therefore governments should be exercised in doing what they were instituted to do, namely, to protect the people in the enjoyment of their rights. Beyond this sphere they possess no legitimate authority at all; for popular governments are only the expression of the will of the majority. The majority can and should govern in the sphere for which governments were instituted to act, prescribing how the government's purpose of protecting and preserving individual rights is to be carried out, whether municipal, state, or national. **Beyond that sphere the majority has no right to interfere. It should be borne in mind that although popular governments represent the will of the majority, they were instituted to protect the rights of the minority—the individual. The moment, then, that**

government interferes to regulate the conduct of an individual in matters that do not infringe on the inalienable rights of others, it begins to act against its own nature and purpose: it invades, rather than protects, the rights of the minority.

There are other important considerations at issue. A man's highest and most exalted loyalty in all things must be to his Creator; therefore *the domain of conscience* is a field into which human governments, whether of one or many, have **no** rightful claim to intrude. **It is impossible for an individual to keep his conscience and loyalty intact before God if he decides to violate them in order to preserve the will of others. As a moral responsible being he must remain faithful to his Creator at any cost, even at the expense of his own life**. In such cases the Lord's word says: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." **The Creator's word tells us in essence: "Do not go with the crowd to do evil."** This places each man under his own responsibility and demonstrates that every question of duty to the Creator, ***a matter of conscience*, is one in which majorities and minorities have no part.**

Although God demands the first and best affections of man, He provided the safeguards of His law around His creatures, and to every moral being He commands: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" In an early stage of human history, man rebelled against the law of his Creator. The divine command of equal and disinterested love toward our fellow men no longer afforded the necessary protection, and therefore God permitted men to organize for the protection and securing of their natural rights. **This is called civil government, but such government by no means displaces divine government; it in no degree relieves the individual of the obligation to obey divine laws or any divine mandate revealed to him.** Civil government simply provides a means by which men can compel others to yield or to do what they ought to do.

Despite the ordinance of civil government, the Creator remains the great moral Governor; every soul is accountable to Him, and every free moral agent will be judged (Apoc. 14:7). **Allowing any power to stand between the individual and the requirements or instructions of his Creator would destroy individual responsibility to God**. **If it were the province of the State to enforce God's law or any other divine requirement, the individual would naturally seek to fulfill the will of the State rather than the will of God. The effect would be to place the authority and jurisdiction of the State above those of God.** Civil government, as it exists, is an absolute necessity for a social race of free moral agents who remain in a state of alienation from their Creator.

It is evident from the foregoing that there can never be any legitimate conflict between civil authority and the demands of divine mandates—"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (cf. Acts 4:18–20)**—unless a religious body or organization resorts to the civil State (with its permission) as protector to seek redress of grievances and to impose punishments upon fellow men.** God calls this illegitimate combination of church and state—a church employing the State and its laws for its own advantage to demand obedience to its authority, thereby forcing the religious consciences and convictions of others—"the beast and the image of the beast" (Revelation 13). In doing so the Creator warns the world, and professing Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, against obedience to the demands of such unions, or fusions. **Any church that appeals to civil government to make that illegitimate union official, thus converting it into a legitimate union, becomes at that instant a "religious persecuting power"** (Revelation 17). No matter how subtle or civilized a religious persecution may appear today, **the spirit of coercion will always reveal itself through forceful actions.**

3. Did Seventh-day Adventists in 1892 agree with the U.S. Supreme Court's desicion that the United States was a "Christian Nation"?

No. As a result of The “Christian Nation” decision rendered by the Supreme Court of the United States in February 28, 1892, Seventh-day Adventists became the most vocal critics of the "Christian Nation" verdict, for “it layed groundwork for the Mark of the Beast”, even though they were Bible believing Christians and Americans citizens.

With the support of faithful SDAs, Alonzo T. Jones fiercely protested the 1892 Supreme Court *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States* decision, which famously declared America a "Christian nation". **A.T. Jones' Appeal** argued that intertwining the state with any religion fundamentally compromised both civil freedoms and Christian principles.

The specific arguments and actions of SDA pionners included:

The Law of Forced Worship: Pioneers warned that legally designating the U.S. as a "Christian nation" ***would logically lead to state-enforced religious observances.***

Loss of Minority Rights, for declaring America a Christian nation logically disenfranchised Jews, Catholics, agnostics, and other minority faiths who did not subscribe to the specific religious majority, would facilitate intolerance against these minorities, or become an excuse to persecute them.

Today (in 2026), Seventh-day Adventists are no longer a minority; as a majority church, they now seek to be part of the "Christian Nationalism" of the Trump era—a movement that began under the Ronald Reagan administration. However, true Christians who follow Christ and His teachings have defended, do defend, and will continue to defend the same principles upheld by the Adventist pioneers of 1892, because they share that same clarity on church and state. Just as God bequeathed a legacy to Christians starting in the first century—the Holy Scriptures—through the Jewish people and the Spirit of Prophecy given to their prophets. He also left a legacy to the Christians of the last days through the Seventh-day Adventist people by God’s Spirit of Prophecy —"the Testimonies for the SDA Church". To become familiar with that prophetic and historic legacy, please request the series "The Angelic Messages of Revelation" from Sis. Giselle at giselle@protonmail.com. Thank you.